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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000534

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DAS COLLEEN GRAFFY) AND EUR/ACE (TOM ADAMS)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA: USING USG ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS TO LEVERAGE COMMITMENTS TO CLEANER ELECTIONS

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Classified By: CDA A.F.Godfrey for reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

11. (C) Our assistance programs aimed at helping Armenia achieve cleaner elections are big news here. Thanks to a strong Public Diplomacy effort, we have largely dispelled early concerns about whether Armenians should be suspicious that we seek to foment a "color revolution" and have built understanding for our goals. Most of our technical assistance has been in the form of grants to NGOs, training sessions to election officials and observers or advice on drafting legislation. But we have used high-visibility transfers of equipment as opportunities to make our core points through the press. By inviting key political leaders to join us at these transfers, we have effectively co-opted them into making strong public statements in support of our goals. PM Sargsian, who heads Armenia's ruling Republican Party, was a key target in this effort, and his statements at our events rejected manipulation of results and called on voters to participate in the May 12 election. End Summary.

12. (C) The USG's extensive programs to assist Armenia achieve significant progress toward international standards in the May 12 parliamentary election have been the focus of intense media interest here. (Note: Please refer to www.usa.am/democracy.php for more details.) Early press coverage gave voice to suspicion that we sought to affect the outcome of the poll rather than the process. Through targeted public diplomacy events, we have largely succeeded in dispelling this fear. Two interviews with the Charge and the USAID director laid out broad detail of our programs and addressed most concerns. By inviting press to each of our democracy program events, whether a high-profile Justice Department conference on investigating electoral fraud, an NGO launch of a guide to political parties, or a transfer of computer equipment to the Electoral Commission, we have ensured a greater public understanding of our programs.

BEATING THE DRUM FOR A CLEAN ELECTION

13. (C) We used a March 28 meeting of EUR DAS Matt Bryza and then-Defense Minister Serzh Sargsian (on the margins of the funeral of former PM Andranik Markarian) to get a firm public commitment of support for our programs. Sargsian agreed on the spot. Sargsian -- now Prime Minister -- has attended two very public events and at both made unambiguous calls for all parties, government officials, and the voters themselves

honestly to discharge their respective duties to ensure a fair poll on May 12.

CHECK YOUR VOTER REGISTRATION

14. (SBU) On April 13, 2007, the Prime Minister and CDA presided over the handover of ten computers to the National Police's Department of Visas and Registration, (commonly known by its Russian acronym OVIR). OVIR is tasked with maintaining Armenia's national voter registry and with providing voter lists to each territorial and precinct election commission. IFES assistance to OVIR aims to strengthen Armenia's voter registry system via improvements to the Government of Armenia (GOAM) passports database -- the basis for the voter registry -- and enhance the capacity of OVIR offices to update citizen registrations. The ten computers were the first group out of a total forty-five computers that IFES is providing to OVIR. They will be used for real-time display and updating of voter lists through the existing network of OVIR offices. The total cost of the commodity support for the Police/OVIR is approximately \$200,000. All IFES assistance, which includes assistance related to the voter registry, election administration, and voter education, totals about \$2.8 million.

15. (SBU) The April 13 event took place at an OVIR office in a Yerevan police station where citizens go to update, verify, or make corrections to their registration. The event included a demonstration of how the registry works and how corrections could be made. The Prime Minister stressed the importance of an accurate voter registry and urged citizens to check the lists now posted at polling stations around the country to ensure that their registration is correct and that "no stranger is registered at their address." Journalists crowded into the small OVIR office and provided extensive

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coverage of the event on television and in newspapers.

"THE TOOLS FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS ARE IN PLACE"

16. (SBU) The Prime Minister joined CDA and Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairman Karekin Azaryan and IFES at CEC headquarters on April 25 to present the CEC with ten computers and to participate in a signing ceremony for a Letter of Agreement (LOA) between the CEC and IFES. The LOA lays out the assistance that the USG is providing to the CEC.

The computers will be used by the CEC to support communications with Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) and for election results processing to help minimize the time between when the polling stations close and results are announced. Other assistance to the CEC includes training the members of all 41 TECs and all 1,923 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs) -- approximately 17,500 members in total -- and printing election materials, such as posters and candidate lists for PECs.

17. (SBU) Before dozens of television cameras and microphones, the Prime Minister and CDA stressed the importance of transparent elections. CDA said that all of the technical tools are in place for Armenia to hold elections that meet international standards and underscored that it is not only the authorities' responsibility to ensure free and fair elections but that citizens, themselves, play a role in this process. He highlighted that by voting, Armenians not only safeguard that vote from possible manipulation but also have a voice in selecting their country's leaders and direction. In response to a journalist's question about the prospects of free and fair elections, CDA responded that the tools are in place and now political will is necessary. The event concluded with a tour for the participants and press of the CEC results processing

center, press center, and commission meeting room.

18. (C) After both events, we met less publicly with the PM to address more privately some of our key concerns about the upcoming elections and to resolve some eleventh-hour bureaucratic logjams which our programs are facing. Over coffee in the CEC Chairman's office after the ceremony, the PM agreed that IFES should be granted accreditation to observe the election and that a group of IFES-sponsored Afghan election officials should also be allowed to observe the elections.

GODFREY